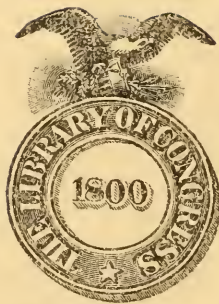


PR 6037  
.Q5 B5  
1920  
Copy 1





Class PR6037

Book Q5B5

Copyright N<sup>o</sup> 1980

**COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.**









# THE BIRDS

AND OTHER POEMS

---

J. C. SQUIRE





# THE BIRDS

AND OTHER POEMS

BY  
*John C. Squire*  
J. C. SQUIRE



NEW YORK

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

PR6037  
.Q5B5  
1920

COPYRIGHT, 1920,  
BY GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

FEB 19 1921  
©CL A608410

TO  
EDMUND GOSSE



## CONTENTS

|                                | PAGE |
|--------------------------------|------|
| THE BIRDS . . . . .            | 11   |
| PROCESSES OF THOUGHT . . . . . | 19   |
| AIRSHIP OVER SUBURB . . . . .  | 31   |
| HARLEQUIN . . . . .            | 35   |
| WINTER NIGHTFALL . . . . .     | 41   |
| SONG . . . . .                 | 49   |
| SONG . . . . .                 | 51   |
| A FAR PLACE . . . . .          | 55   |



# THE BIRDS





## THE BIRDS

Within mankind's duration, so they say,  
Khephren and Ninus lived but yesterday.  
Asia had no name till man was old  
And long had learned the use of iron and gold;  
And æons had passed, when the first corn was  
    planted,  
Since first the use of syllables was granted.

Men were on earth while climates slowly  
    swung,  
Fanning wide zones to heat and cold, and long  
Subsidence turned great continents to sea,  
And seas dried up, dried up interminably,  
Age after age; enormous seas were dried  
Amid wastes of land. And the last monsters  
    died.

## THE BIRDS

Earth wore another face. O since that prime  
Man with how many works has sprinkled time!  
Hammering, hewing, digging tunnels, roads;  
Building ships, temples, multiform abodes.  
How, for his body's appetites, his toils  
Have conquered all earth's products, all her  
soils;  
And in what thousand thousand shapes of art  
He has tried to find a language for his heart!

Never at rest, never content or tired:  
Insatiate wanderer, marvellously fired,  
Most grandly piling and piling into the air  
Stones that will topple or arch he knows not  
where.

And yet did I, this spring, think it more  
strange,  
More grand, more full of awe, than all that  
change,  
And lovely and sweet and touching unto tears,  
That through man's chronicled and unchron-  
icled years,

## THE BIRDS

And even into that unguessable beyond  
The water-hen has nested by a pond,  
Weaving dry flags into a beaten floor,  
The one sure product of her only lore.  
Low on a ledge above the shadowed water  
Then, when she heard no men, as nature  
taught her,  
Plashing around with busy scarlet bill  
She built that nest, her nest, and builds it still.

O let your strong imagination turn  
The great wheel backward, until Troy unburn,  
And then unbuild, and seven Troys below  
Rise out of death, and dwindle, and outflow,  
Till all have passed, and none has yet been  
there:

Back, ever back. Our birds still crossed the  
air;

Beyond our myriad changing generations  
Still built, unchanged, their known inhabita-  
tions.

A million years before Atlantis was

## THE BIRDS

Our lark sprang from some hollow in the  
grass,  
Some old soft hoof-print in a tussock's shade;  
And the wood-pigeon's smooth snow-white  
eggs were laid,  
High amid green pines' sunset-coloured  
shafts,  
And rooks their villages of twiggy rafts  
Set on the tops of elms, where elms grew then,  
And still the thumbing tit and perky wren  
Popped through the tiny doors of cosy balls  
And the blackbird lined with moss his high-  
built walls;  
A round mud cottage held the thrush's young,  
And straws from the untidy sparrow's hung.  
And, skimming forktailed in the evening air,  
When man first was were not the martens  
there?  
Did not those birds some human shelter crave,  
And stow beneath the cornice of his cave  
Their dry tight cups of clay? And from each  
door  
Peeped on a morning wiseheads three or four.

## THE BIRDS

Yes, daw and owl, curlew and crested hern,  
Kingfisher, mallard, water-rail and tern,  
Chaffinch and greenfinch, wagtail, stonechat,  
ruff,

Pied warbler, robin, fly-catcher and chough,  
Missel-thrush, magpie, sparrow-hawk and jay,  
Built, those far ages gone, in this year's way.

And the first man who walked the cliffs of  
Rome,

As I this year, looked down and saw the same  
Blotches of rusty red on ledge and cleft  
With grey-green spots on them, while right  
and left

A dizzying tangle of gulls were floating and  
flying,

Wheeling and crossing and darting, crying  
and crying,

Circling and crying, over and over and over,  
Crying with swoop and hover and fall and  
recover.

And below on a rock against the grey sea  
fretted,

Pipe-necked and stationary and silhouetted,

## THE BIRDS

Cormorants stood in a wise, black, equal row  
Above the nests and long blue eggs we know.

O delicate chain over all the ages stretched,  
O dumb tradition from what far darkness  
    fetched:

Each little architect with its one design  
Perpetual, fixed and right in stuff and line,  
Each little ministrant who knows one thing,  
One learnèd rite to celebrate the spring.  
Whatever alters else on sea and shore,  
These are unchanging: man must still explore.

# PROCESSES OF THOUGHT





## PROCESSES OF THOUGHT

### I

I find my mind as it were a deep water.

Sometimes I play with a thought and hammer  
and bend it,  
Till tired and displeased with that I toss it  
away,  
Or absently let it slip to the yawning water:  
And down it sinks, forgotten for many a day.

But a time comes when tide or tempest washes  
it  
High on the beach, and I find that shape of  
mine,

## THE BIRDS

Or I haul it out from the depths on some  
casual rope,  
Or, passing over that spot in quiet shine,

I see, where my boat's shadow makes deep the  
water,  
A patch of colour, far down, from the bottom  
apart,  
A wavering sign like the gleam from an  
ancient anchor,  
Brown fixing and fleeting flakes; and I feel  
my heart

Wake to a strange excitement; so that I stop,  
Put up my paddles and dredge with a careful  
net:  
And I catch it, and see it stir, and feel its  
weight,  
And pull till it nears and breaks from the  
water wet.

## PROCESSES OF THOUGHT

And my eyes dwell on that old abandoned  
thing  
Recovered by chance. For the shape I had  
found so dull  
Has crusted and changed in secrecy and  
silence,  
And its surface shines like a pearl, most beautiful.

## II

In bed I lie, and my thoughts come fling by,  
All forms and faces, cheerful, serene and sad:  
Some clear, some mistily showing and frag-  
mentary,  
Some altered in size or shape since last they  
were seen.

But O last, you group of merry ones!  
Lord knows when I saw you before, but I met  
you once,  
The whole collection of you, impudent-eyed;  
And now, rosy and grinning, with linked arms  
You go swingingly by, turning your faces to  
mine,  
I laugh aloud; you bad lots; you are a secret,  
That nobody else knows.

## PROCESSES OF THOUGHT

And you it was that made me break the procession

(While memory gave me still the power of summons),

And call up all I could of a half-hour's thoughts

To parade them across this proscenium of my skull

In the order they came in, more carefully recognising

The old, and remarking which have developed or changed.

And as for you, you rogues, I am almost certain

There are one or two more of you now than once there were.

\* \* \* \*

Good-bye! Good-bye! Dance through the dark door

In to the life that somewhere else you lead.

And one day I shall all unwittingly call

Some word you know as a signal, or you'll see

## THE BIRDS

Someone else coming my way; you'll suddenly  
follow,  
And you'll appear again, quite possibly  
Bringing new friends—who are sure to be just  
as bad.

### III

Into the pits of my heart and brain,  
My eyes, ears, nose, tongue, fingers, like five  
    gardeners  
Are shovelling sights, sounds, odours, savours,  
    contacts,  
While I, their master, casually nod, and most  
    times  
Stand idly by, looking at something else,  
Forgetting that the work is going on  
And only fully conscious of my servants  
When something they move is consonant with  
    my mood  
And draws my notice; or some other thing,  
More strange than usual or stronger in its  
    impact  
Makes them exclaim and call to bid me watch.

## THE BIRDS

And then in a ground of more than our dimensions

Those quietly flowing cascades of things are hid.

They are buried in those illimitable fields,

And ever as they are swallowed by the earth

The steady hours passing in procession

Walk over them and trample them well down

Out of sight, levelling all the soil.

Then some time my returning feet uncover them

(My slaves are all agog with recognition)

Or else perhaps I come and idly dig

To see what thing I can find, and out there comes

Some old form buried twenty years ago

Now called a memory.

Or marking well the place where one was put

Find it and more, drawn thither under the ground,



## PROCESSES OF THOUGHT

Tangled with others as flower-roots with roots  
Into a new festoon, or one old image,  
Wearing others like gems. And that's crea-  
tion.



# AIRSHIP OVER SUBURB



## AIRSHIP OVER SUBURB

A smooth blue sky with puffed motionless  
clouds.

Standing over the plain of red roofs and bushy  
trees  
The bright coloured shell of the large enam-  
elled sky.

Out of the distance pointing, a cut dark shape  
That moves this way at leisure, then hesitates  
and turns:

And its darkness suddenly dies as it turns and  
shows

A gleaming silver, white against even the  
whitest cloud.

## THE BIRDS

Across the blue and the low small clouds it  
moves

Level, with a floating cloud-like motion of its  
own,

Peaceful, sunny and slow, a thing of summer  
itself,

Above the basking earth, travelling the clouds  
and the sky.

# HARLEQUIN





## HARLEQUIN

Moonlit woodland, veils of green,  
Caves of empty dark between;  
Veils of green from rounded arms  
Drooping, that the moonlight charms:  
Tranced the trees, grass beneath  
Silent. . . .

Like a stealthy breath,  
Mask and wand and silver skin,  
Sudden enters Harlequin.

Hist! Hist! Watch him go,  
Leaping limb and pointing toe,  
Slender arms that float and flow,  
Curving wand above, below;  
Flying, gliding, changing feet;  
Onset merging in retreat,

## THE BIRDS

Not a shadow of sound there is  
But his motion's gentle hiss,  
Till one fluent arm and hand  
Suddenly circles, and the wand  
Taps a bough far overhead,  
"Crack," and then all noise is dead.  
For he halts, and for a space  
Stands erect with upward face,  
Taut and tense to the white  
Message of the moon's light.

What is he thinking of, you ask;  
Caught you the eyes behind the mask?  
Whence did he come, where would he go?  
Answers but the resuming flow  
Of that swift continuous glide,  
Whispering from side to side,  
Silvered boughs, branches dim,  
All the world's a frame for him;  
All the trees standing around  
On the fascinated ground,  
See him swifter, swifter, sweep,  
Dazzling, till one wildest leap . . .

## HARLEQUIN

Whisht! he kneels. And he listens.  
How his steady silver glistens.

He was listening; he was there;  
Flash! he went. To the air  
He a waiting ear had bent,  
Silent; but before he went  
Something somewhere else to seek,  
He moved his lips as though to speak.

And we wait, and in vain,  
For he will not come again.  
Earth, grass, wood, and air,  
As we stare, and we stare,  
Which that fierce life did hold,  
Tired, dim, void, cold.



# WINTER NIGHTFALL



## WINTER NIGHTFALL

The old yellow stucco  
Of the time of the Regent  
Is flaking and peeling:  
The rows of square windows  
In the straight yellow building  
Are empty and still;  
And the dusty dark evergreens  
Guarding the wicket  
Are draped with wet cobwebs,  
And above this poor wilderness  
Toneless and sombre  
Is the flat of the hill.

## THE BIRDS

They said that a colonel  
Who long ago died here  
Was the last one to live here:  
An old retired colonel,  
Some Fraser or Murray,  
    I don't know his name;  
Death came here and summoned him,  
And the shells of him vanished  
Beyond all speculation;  
And silence resumed here,  
Silence and emptiness,  
    And nobody came.



## WINTER NIGHTFALL

Was it wet when he lived here,  
Were the skies dun and hurrying,  
Was the rain so irresolute?  
Did he watch the night coming,  
Did he shiver at nightfall

    Before he was dead?  
Did the wind go so creepily,  
Chilly and puffing,  
With drops of cold rain in it?  
Was the hill's lifted shoulder  
So lowering and menacing,  
    So dark and so dread?

## THE BIRDS

Did he turn through his doorway  
And go to his study,  
And light many candles?  
And fold in the shutters,  
And heap up the fireplace  
    To fight off the damp?  
And muse on his boyhood,  
And wonder if India  
Ever was real?  
And shut out the loneliness  
With pig-sticking memoirs  
    And collections of stamps?

## WINTER NIGHTFALL

Perhaps. But he's gone now,  
He and his furniture  
Dispersed now for ever;  
And the last of his trophies,  
Antlers and photographs,  
    Heaven knows where.  
And there's grass in his gateway,  
Grass on his footpath,  
Grass on his door-step;  
The garden's grown over,  
The well-chain is broken,  
    The windows are bare.

## THE BIRDS

And I leave him behind me,  
For the straggling, discoloured  
Rags of the daylight,  
And hills and stone walls  
And a rick long forgotten  
    Of blackening hay:  
The road pale and sticky,  
And cart-ruts and nail marks,  
And wind-ruffled puddles,  
And the slop of my footsteps  
In this desolate country's  
    Cadaverous clay.

# TWO SONGS



## SONG

You are my sky; beneath your circling kindness

My meadows all take in the light and grow;  
Laugh with the joy you've given,  
The joy you've given,  
And open in a thousand buds, and blow.

But when you are sombre, sad, averse, forgetful,

Heavily veiled by clouds that brood with rain,

Dumbly I lie all shadowed,  
I lie all shadowed,  
And dumbly wait for you to shine again.





## SONG

The heaven is full of the moon's light,  
The earth fades below.  
In this vast empty world of night  
I only know.

Pale-shining trees and moonlit fields,  
The bird's tune,  
And my night-flowering heart that yields  
Her fragrance to the moon.



# A FAR PLACE



## A FAR PLACE

Sheltered, when the rain blew over the hills it  
was,  
Sunny all day when the days of summer were  
long,  
Beyond all rumour of labouring towns it was,  
But at dawn and evening its trees were noisy  
with song.

There were four elms on the southward lawn  
standing,  
Their great trunks evenly set in a square  
Of shadowed grass in spring pierced with  
crocuses,  
And their tops met high in the empty air.

## THE BIRDS

Where the morning rose the grey church was  
    below us,  
If we stood by the porch we saw on either  
    hand  
The ground falling, the trees falling, and  
    meadows,  
A river, hamlets and spires: a chequered land,  
  
A wide country where cloud shadows went  
    chasing  
Mile after mile, diminishing fast, until  
They met the far blue downs; but round the  
    corner  
The western garden lay lonely under the hill.  
  
                                . . . . .  
And closed in the western garden, under the  
    hillside,  
Where silence was and the rest of the world  
    was gone,  
We saw and took the curving year's munifi-  
    cence:  
Changing from flower to flower the garden  
    shone.  
[56]

## A FAR PLACE

Early its walks were fringed with little rock-  
plants,  
Sprays and tufts of blossom, white, yellow,  
and blue,  
And all about were sprinkled stars of nar-  
cissus,  
And swathes of tulips all over the garden  
grew.

White groups and pink, red, crimson and  
lemon-yellow,  
And the yellow-and-red-streaked tulips once  
loved by a boy;  
Red and yellow their stiff and varnished  
petals,  
And the scent of them stings me still with a  
youthful joy.

And in the season of perfect and frailest  
beauty,  
Pear-blossom broke and the lilacs' waxen  
cones,

## THE BIRDS

And a tranced laburnum trailing its veils of  
yellow  
Tenderly drooped over the ivied stones.

The lilacs browned, a breath dried the laburnum,  
The swollen peonies scattered the earth with  
blood,  
And the rhododendrons shed their sumptuous  
mantles,  
And the marshalled irises unsceptred stood.

And the borders filled with daisies and pied  
sweet-williams,  
And busy pansies; and there as we gazed and  
dreamed,  
And breathed the swooning smell of the  
packed carnations,  
The present was always the crown of all: it  
seemed  
[58]



## A FAR PLACE

Each month more beautiful sprang from a  
    robe discarded,  
The year all effortless dropt the best away  
And struck the heart with loveliness new, more  
    lavish;  
When the clambering rose had blown and died,  
    by day

The broad-leaved tapering many-shielded  
    hollyhocks  
Stood like pillars and shone to the August sun,  
The glimmering cups of waking evening prim-  
    roses  
Filled the dusk now the scent of the rose was  
    done.

. . . . .  
A wall there was and a door to the rose-  
    garden,  
And out of that a gate to the orchard led,  
And there was the last hedge, and the turf  
    sloped upward  
Till the sky was cut by the hill's line overhead.

## THE BIRDS

And thither at times we climbed, and far  
below us  
That world that had made the world remote  
was seen,  
Small, a huddle of russet roofs and chimneys,  
And its guard of elms like bushes against the  
green:

One spot in the country, little and mild and  
homely,  
The nearest house of a wide populous  
plain. . . .  
But down at evening under the stars and the  
branches  
In the whispering garden we lost the world  
again.

. . . .

Whispering, faint, the garden under the hill-  
side . . .  
Under the stars. . . . Is it true that we lived  
there long?  
[60]

## A FAR PLACE

Was it certainly so? Did ever we know that  
dwelling,  
Breathe that night, and hear in the night that  
song?









LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 720 672 0 ●